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SUBJECT: EASTERN DRC NOTES - JANUARY 30

¶1. (U) The items contained in this report consist principally of spot information from various sources. This report is not exhaustive, nor can all the information contained therein be confirmed at this time.

LRA Issues

¶2. (SBU) MONUC reported that on January 27, LRA rebels killed 40 civilians in the city of Meridi, a major city in southern Sudan. A counterattack by the local population reportedly failed. MONUC speculated that, once Okot Odhiambo had surrendered, his fighters may have gone on this rampage (Note: An unconfirmed press report alleges that Odhiambo has already surrendered to the UPDF. End note).

¶3. (SBU) A senior MONUC official provided a briefing on a recent visit to Haut Uele, describing the situation as "a humanitarian catastrophe." The LRA was keeping several armies at bay, inflicting terrible suffering on local populations. The situation has been compounded because humanitarian groups are unable to reach affected areas; even within Dungu, humanitarian organizations must travel with MONUC escorts. The LRA continues to prefer using machetes on victims to preserve low supplies of bullets. The UPDF, according to MONUC, believes it will spend another 15 months fighting the LRA.

¶4. (SBU) A western diplomat, who had recently traveled to Dungu, told PolCouns that there has been a noticeable breakdown in FARDC discipline in Haut Uele since Operation Lightning Thunder began. FARDC soldiers, who arrived in increased numbers in the area on December 1, were initially disciplined. However, recently, the FARDC has committed rapes, looting, and extortion in the area. MONUC and UPDF forces are not present in the city, restricting themselves to the MONUC base 10 kilometers from the city and the airport.

¶5. (SBU) Moreover, the civilian population is terrified, expecting an attack on Dungu. While this may be unlikely, our contact said that it is not impossible, given MONUC's reduced presence and the ability of the LRA to evoke fear. The LRA's tactic of dividing up into smaller, more mobile units appears to be successful, according to our contact. The civilian population and local politicians recognize the LRA poses a tremendous threat, but the population is obviously frustrated.

¶6. (SBU) A senior MONUC military officer in Kinshasa noted that the UPDF invitation to operate in DRC territory has been extended until February 6. He also said that MONUC is reinforcing its presence in the area with Guatemalan special forces and a company of Moroccan soldiers. They are working on road rehabilitation between Dungu and the town of Duru to the north, which could be used as a humanitarian corridor.

¶7. (SBU) The hope is to use the Guatemalans as the backbone of a quick reaction force to address LRA problems, and use the Moroccan

company to establish a Forward Operating Base at Duru. Separately, MONUC has helped provide transportation to the FARDC, which reportedly has established a more extensive footprint in the area (Comment: Despite all of this, MONUC's contribution to the anti-LRA effort is clearly limited. The organization does not have much of a presence in Haut Uele and is generally confined to the base at Dungu, with not much projection beyond that. MONUC, overall, does not appear to have a good idea what the FARDC and UPDF are doing at any given moment in Haut Uele. End comment).

Joint FARDC/RDF Operation

¶18. (SBU) There are persistent rumors that some women and children of FDLR combatants have left for safer areas. FDLR forces continue to mass near Kashebe, Ntoto, and Bunyakiri in South Kivu. MONUC opined the FDLR may be massing in these areas either to confront the joint operation directly or to prepare for a withdrawal to Maniema or Katanga, neither of which is mutually exclusive. The FDLR is also reportedly ready to deploy up to eight battalions in two phases along the Kavuma-Kalehe axis in South Kivu.

¶19. (SBU) MONUC strategy focuses on containing the FDLR at the line between North and South Kivu. MONUC cautioned that, because of the terrain, it will not be able to prevent all FDLR fighters from attempting to move from South to North Kivu. MONUC highlighted the area near Shabunda as a particularly vulnerable area for potential FDLR reprisals. Because it is not accessible by road, it would be particularly difficult for humanitarian and protection assistance to reach this area. MONUC cautioned that it has been effectively shut

KINSHASA 00000094 002 OF 002

out of most details on operational planning.

¶110. (SBU) MONUC reported that the FARDC and RDF are close to finishing the process of closing off the Rwandan and Ugandan borders. Offensive actions against the FDLR will commence in the following phase. Seven FARDC brigades are committed to the operation. The best estimate of current RDF numbers is 3-4,000 (Note: RDF forces still refer to themselves as "special intelligence units." End note). Separately, MONUC will potentially provide logistical support (specifically, transportation, food, medical, fuel and airlift support) to the FARDC in the course of this operation, as well as training for newly integrated units.

¶111. (SBU) Comment: What remains unclear is how victory is to be defined in this effort, whether that be wiping out the FDLR as a whole or ensuring that all are repatriated back to Rwanda; or the capture or killing of the top level commanders; or something else entirely. End comment

CNDP Issues

¶112. (SBU) A North Kivu source, with direct contacts to the Amani Process and good contacts to the CNDP and other armed groups, told PolCouns that Bosco remained reluctant to commit CNDP fighters to integration with the FARDC. This explained why he showed up one hour late for a FARDC/CNDP integration ceremony at Rumangabo on January 29. This source maintained that Nkunda had recently moved from Gisenyi to Kigali (Note: a senior MONUC official in Kinshasa reported the same information. End note) and that he had directly contacted our source to confirm that he remained "in control" of the CNDP.

¶113. (SBU) Our contact insisted that the GDRC had orchestrated the split between Bosco and Nkunda. According to our contact, Kigali had initially proposed Nkunda as the force commander for the FARDC/RDF joint operation, but Kinshasa rejected this idea. Kigali then proposed John Numbi instead, and the GDRC immediately accepted. Part of the DRC-Rwandan deal allegedly included the division of North Kivu along the lines of the Grand Nord and the Petit Nord, as well as ensuring a governmental position for Nkunda when the dust had settled. Regarding the January 29 Rumangabo integration ceremony, our contact said it was purely symbolic, "nothing more than a re-run of the failed mixage process." The operation,

according to our contact, is run by a very small circle of Rwandan and DRC officials.

¶14. (SBU) omment: At the very least, despite general plans escribed by MONUC for an initial "accelerated" intgration process for CNDP fighters followed by a ore measured "classic" process, exactly how thisall would work is unclear. A senior MONUC officia in Kinshasa hinted at the idea that the CNDP ran and file (which apparently is 70-80 percent Hut) may not be on board with their commanders, whoare mostly Tutsi and who, according to the officia, have gone over to Bosco. End comment

GARVELINK